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DE RUEHDF #0027/01 141114Z
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 201142Z MAY 08
FM AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0145
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUCNFRG/FRG COLLECTIVE
RUEHDF/AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF 0161

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSSELDORF 000027

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [GM](#)
SUBJECT: GERMAN MUSLIM LEADER FLAGS ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION AS
PRIORITY

REF: A) 07 DUESSELDORF 0010; B) 07 DUESSELDORF 0031

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a recent conversation, the new spokesperson for Germany's Muslim Coordination Council (KRM), Ali Kizilkaya, stressed to us that his priority for his six month term is to advocate for the introduction of Islamic religious instruction in the public schools. He also expressed dissatisfaction that the Islam Conference, the German government-organized dialogue with the main Muslim communities, focuses too heavily on security matters. We found Kizilkaya more open and moderate than in past conversations, perhaps because he now represents the interests of all of Germany's main Muslim groups joined together under the KRM umbrella. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On March 28, Ali Kizilkaya became spokesman for the Cologne-based KRM, a group which represents four national umbrella groups (Islamrat, DITIB, VIKZ, and ZMD) that united in 2007, through a routine appointment based on the organization's six month rotating principle (Ref B). His ascendance raised eyebrows, because he chaired the Islamic Council (Islamrat) -- the most conservative of Germany's Muslim umbrella groups -- for the past six years and is a former Secretary General of the Germany chapter of the Turkey-based Milli Goerues (IGMG), the Islamrat's largest and most influential member organization. The Office for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC) includes IGMG in the category of "suspect Islamist organizations" because "its ideology supports a comprehensive Islamic social order that is viewed as being contradictory to Germany's free democratic constitutional structure." This prompted speculation about the direction the KRM would take under Kizilkaya's stewardship.

Representing a Broader Constituency

¶3. (SBU) Aware of the skepticism surrounding his appointment, Kizilkaya has stressed to the press in recent weeks that he will not represent the Islamrat or IGMG (of which he remains a member), but rather the views of the KRM constituent organizations "just as the chairman of the DGB (labor federation) represents the entire DGB and not just (the metalworkers union) IG Metall." He has also maintained that Milli Goerues is changing internally, that hardline first generation leaders are being replaced, that extremist and anti-Semitic statements by members are "isolated cases," that IGMG is non-violent, and that the Koran does not conflict with the German constitution.

Focus on Islamic Religious Instruction in the Schools

¶4. (SBU) Kizilkaya emphasized to Pol/Econ officer that the introduction of Islamic religious instruction in the public schools is his most important priority for his term as KRM spokesman, which ends September 30. He asserted that some 800,000 Muslim public schools students are being "denied their constitutional right" to religious instruction under Article 7 of the German Basic Law. He added that German authorities are "dragging their feet" and "hiding behind pretexts" to explain why Islamic religious instruction are not yet offered as it is for Christians and Jews, underlining that progress on this issue would give Muslim integration in Germany an "enormous boost." He stressed that the KRM and its constituent groups have accepted the government's position that associations of local mosque communities (not the KRM or its member organizations) would be partners for state school administrations in developing the legal prerequisites for such Islamic religious instruction. Kizilkaya gave no indication of how he would about doing this.

Islam Conference: Too much Emphasis on Security Issues

¶5. (SBU) Kizilkaya expressed disappointment regarding the ongoing German Islam Conference, initiated by Federal Interior Minister Schaeuble in 2006 to promote Muslim integration in German society. He stated that the KRM was "not satisfied" with the conference, in large part because of its excessive focus on security issues. The KRM and the other member Muslim groups found this "burdensome" and not conducive to a constructive dialogue. As a case in point, he referred critically to Schaeuble's efforts to introduce legislation authorizing law enforcement agencies to eavesdrop on conversations between imams and suspected Islamist terrorists, while Christian and Jewish clergymen were protected against such monitoring. This "discriminatory treatment" of Muslim clergy was "irritating" and contradicted the spirit of the Islam Conference, Kizilkaya said.
(Note: Confession is constitutionally protected in Germany.)

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Schaeuble has justified his position on the grounds that authorities should be able to monitor suspected terrorists who have in the past concealed communications during religious services or conversations with imams. End Note.)

Comment

¶6. (SBU) In our meeting, Kizilkaya was more open and talkative than we have known him to be in the past. Usually very reserved, he stated his views more diplomatically and less provocatively. This may be because he met with us as KRM spokesman and not as chair of the Islamrat or member of its fundamentalist IGMG. With regard to Kizilkaya's view that Germany is "dragging its feet" on religious instruction, we note that the North Rhine-Westphalia government has been working proactively and constructively for some time with local Muslim communities on religious instruction in the schools and is intent on reaching an agreement, but sees the onus on local mosque communities to move that process forward.

¶7. (U) This message has been coordinated with Embassy Berlin.
BOYSE